

**Unreformed and Unwelcomed: The Growth of Calvinist Intolerance  
towards Catholics during the early Eighty Years' War**

Tyler Hengst

Advisor: Dr. Lee Palmer Wandel

UW-Madison Department of History  
Undergraduate Senior Honors Thesis  
Spring 2023

<sup>1</sup>Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. <sup>2</sup>For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. <sup>3</sup>Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. <sup>4</sup>Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.

Romans 14:1-4, KJV

In 1578, Philippe Duplessis-Mornay was assigned a complicated task. A French Huguenot, Mornay was a religious advisor to the rebel leader William of Orange. The Prince sought the publication of his religious manifesto, which was ghost-written by his advisor. William's message was officially aimed towards his sovereign, King Philip II of Spain. It reaffirmed why many of the Seventeen Provinces were rebelling against their King and, to an extent, persuaded regional leaders to embrace religious freedom between Catholics and Calvinists. Mornay's *Religionsvrede* envisioned a utopian outcome for the rebel provinces. In his *Mémoires*, Mornay proclaimed:

If you desire freedom for yourself, you should not oppose the freedom of others<sup>1</sup> [and] All of us want to live in freedom of conscience without being investigated by an inquisitor. But this agreement alone is not enough. We must have another agreement as well, namely that of not interfering with each other's freedom of conscience and religious practice in all these lands, since we all wish to live here in liberty.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation, Volume 2* (Associated Press of New York, 1960), 214.

<sup>2</sup> Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation*, 215.

Mornay's intended audience was Catholic. As a Calvinist, Mornay's goal was to illustrate rebelling Calvinists as lovers of liberty yearning for freedom. If the Calvinists sought such tolerance from Catholics, what were they willing to tolerate in return? Rebel Calvinists had acquired a reputation for religious fanaticism which caused Catholics to approach tolerance with caution. In his 1578 *Discours sur la permission de liberté de religion dicte Religionsvrede au Païs-Bas*, even Mornay discussed his concern over Calvinist fanaticism:

Now I wish to say a few words about those of the Reformed<sup>3</sup> religion who find it hard to tolerate among them the practice of the Roman Catholic religion. And I will start in this way: those who have broken the statues, driven out the Roman religion and seized the goods of the Church wherever they could put their hands on them, have been the cause that the Roman Catholics are deeply perturbed; judging by these beginnings, wherever [Calvinists] are tolerated they would indulge in such activities. So it has come about that several important towns that were otherwise disposed to receive the [Reformed] religion for the sake of the country's unity, have closed their gates.<sup>4</sup>

What began with Spain's military crackdown on iconoclastic riots, religious violence in the Provinces eventually developed into an open rebellion. The rebelling provinces grappled fiercely with the question of tolerance through the early years of the revolt. Modernly referred to as the Dutch Revolt, the conflict ultimately lasted for eight decades, and society's reasons for continuing the war evolved over time. Chronologically, this analysis will focus on the first two decades of the revolt.

---

<sup>3</sup> The terms 'Calvinist' and 'Reformed' are synonymous and may be used interchangeably.

<sup>4</sup> Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation*, 214.

The Seventeen Provinces of the 1560s were not unified. They were rather a collection of independent countries each in a personal union with the King of Spain. Even after violence broke out in 1566, the rebel provinces continued to recognize Philip II as their sovereign until 1581. This leads us to the question: as the revolt drifted away from an anti-Spanish policy conflict to a full war for separation, how did rebel Calvinists' tolerance towards Catholics change? What liberties were the Calvinists willing to deny the unreformed?

The answer is quite straightforward: rebel Calvinists indeed became increasingly intolerant towards their Catholic neighbors. The first two decades of the revolt tell us a story of how the persecuted became the persecutors. This story will be told through a variety of individual sources which illustrate a growing trend. This trend will be analyzed in four sections: Catholic attitudes towards the Reformed, the formation and organization of Calvinist churches, the growth of Calvinist influence in the northern provinces, and the status of Catholics regarding provincial separation from Spain. Those who sought the liberty to worship freely ultimately denied others the same right. Mornay's valued golden rule "Do not to another what thou wouldst not have done to thee"<sup>5,6</sup> was disregarded by rebel Calvinist hypocrisy.

---

<sup>5</sup> Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation*, 215.

<sup>6</sup> Tobit 4:15.



7

Calvinists under Catholic Authority: a Complicated Relationship

As Calvinists became more numerous in the Provinces through the 1560s and early 1570s, Catholics reacted to the new religion’s spread in different ways. Individual cities, parishes and entire provinces had the autonomy to make their own decisions regarding the Calvinists. In this section, we will examine several instances of Calvinist treatment under Catholic authorities. This will further our understanding of how Calvinist sentiments towards Catholics developed during the first few years of the revolt.

The Calvinists were not the first religious group to threaten Catholic hegemony in the Provinces. Lutheranism gained popularity in the 1520s, but failed to maintain its influence. The Anabaptists succeeded the Lutherans in the mid-century, but were aggressively persecuted. As an example of said aggressiveness, Emperor Charles V’s *Placaert van Vlaanderen* of 10 June 1535 stated:

---

<sup>7</sup> This map visualizes the northern provinces post-1648. Although the geopolitical situation in the late 16th century was different, the majority of this analysis’s sources occur within the highlighted region.

All those, male or female, who are found to be infected by the said condemned sect of Anabaptists or those that baptize again, whatever class or condition they belong to, those that indulge, adhere or abet in this, will incur the forfeiture of body and property, and will be put to death without delay. That is to say, by fire...<sup>8</sup>

Based on this precedent, Calvinists had a good reason to be worried about their well-being. Previous Catholic authorities were clearly willing to exterminate those who opposed them, as evident by Charles's placard. Due to this violence, it is no wonder why the Reformed had reservations about their own treatment.

Observations from July of 1566, a month before the *Beeldenstorm*<sup>9</sup>, suggest that anti-Calvinist persecution was mostly ineffective. In his personal memoirs, Amsterdam merchant Laurens Jacobszoon Reael—a moderate Calvinist—discussed the state of religious affairs through the late 1560s and 1570s. One entry mentioned the Calvinist minister Cornelius van Diest, who was illegally preaching around 's-Hertogenbosch—a city in northern Brabant—in 1566. The city's schout<sup>10</sup> requested that Den Bosch's councilmen send sixty militiamen against Van Diest. The council, most of whom were Catholic, refused.<sup>11</sup> Even into the seventeenth century, Brabant maintained a large Catholic population. Reael's account suggests that anti-Calvinist intolerance was perhaps not as rampant as expected. Indeed, Den Bosch is a single city in an independent province, yet Catholic authorities' decision not to prosecute Van Diest suggests an element of tolerance.

---

<sup>8</sup> Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation*, 192.

<sup>9</sup>Beeldenstorm: an iconoclasm: specifically refers to Calvinist riots which destroyed Catholic imagery in churches.

<sup>10</sup> Schout: an administrative official.

<sup>11</sup> *The Hedge-Preaching in Holland, July 1566*, accessed 3/6/2023  
<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15660700.aspx>

By the launch of the revolt, Calvinism had obtained followers in Flanders, Brabant and Guelders. The situation in Holland was however far more tense. Through a Catholic lens, two Calvinist ministers—Pieter Gabriel from Bruges—a Fleming— and Jan Arentszoon from Alkmaar—a Hollander—were a source of concern throughout the province. The pair, risking their lives, preached the Heidelberg Catechism in ‘Moorderdam’ and gained a substantial following.<sup>12</sup> Gabriel and Arentzoon’s preaching was unacceptable for magistrates such as Elbert Huik, who traveled to Rome to gain the Pope’s support. Huik spent the next three years leading Amsterdam’s crusade against Holland’s Calvinist population. At his pinnacle of power Huik expelled the Calvinists from Leiden, but was mysteriously imprisoned due to ‘madness’ in 1569. He spent the remainder of his life imprisoned until his death in 1594.<sup>13</sup> This story, which was again documented by Reael, is used as a counterweight to the Den Bosch example. Was Den Bosch’s council unique, or did it represent a greater trend? Clearly, Den Bosch’s government did not feel threatened enough by Van Diest to persecute him. Hollanders such as Huik, however, were more wary. This complicated the Calvinist perception as to whether or not Catholics were trustworthy comrades.

A major source of support for the Calvinist cause came from Reformed nobles. In July of 1566, for example, Florian van Pallandt, Count of Culemborg, ordered a local iconoclasm and hired a Calvinist minister.<sup>14</sup> According to Reael, Calvinist successes, such as in Culemborg—a village in Guelders—further inspired Gabriel and Arentszoon in Holland. The two had been preaching in private, and after 8 July the *Hof van Holland*<sup>15</sup> released a new placard banning Calvinist preachings and offered a 600-fleming reward for information. As a result, Gabriel and

---

<sup>12</sup> Moorderdam: “Murderdam”: a Calvinist term for Catholic Amsterdam

<sup>13</sup> *The Hedge-Preaching in Holland, July 1566*, accessed 3/6/2023  
<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15660700.aspx>

<sup>14</sup> *The Hedge-Preaching in Holland, July 1566*, accessed 3/6/2023  
<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15660700.aspx>

<sup>15</sup> “Court of Holland”

Arentszoon defiantly conducted their first public sermon in Hoorn on 14 July.<sup>16</sup> Through the rest of July and into August, Holland's Catholic authorities did little to limit Calvinism's spread. The preachers were still banned from major cities, but locals from cities such as Amsterdam, Haarlem and Leiden attended outdoor sermons every Sunday. The Calvinists had also established a system of security; when schout Pieter Pieterszoon of Haarlem sent a hundred-man militia to disperse a congregation, Calvinist scouts alerted the preachers beforehand. On the eve of the Beeldenstorm, Margaret of Parma met with her stadtholder William of Orange. The two agreed that the best way to preserve peace was to limit aggression. Margaret had endorsed the Hof van Holland's placard, even though she soon agreed to disband them. Reael's *dagboek* entries, which primarily focused on Holland, implied that intolerant Catholic leadership lacked the power to persecute. The Calvinists may have faced harsh rhetoric and expulsions, but were generally able to secure new congregational membership.

The iconoclasm of August 1566 significantly changed Spanish-provincial relations.<sup>17</sup> Calvinist nobles formed rebel militias known as *Geuzen*<sup>18</sup> which played an important role when military action broke out.<sup>19</sup> In response, Catholic authorities still loyal to Spain formed a system known as the Council of Troubles.<sup>20</sup> During Margaret's final year as governor, along with Fernando Álvarez de Toledo, the "Iron" Duke of Alba's early military occupation, the Council of Troubles largely relied on banishments and non-lethal punishment. Those condemned by the Council were from various social positions. On 20 October 1568, the Council of Troubles, under

---

<sup>16</sup> *The Hedge-Preaching in Holland, July 1566*, accessed 3/6/2023  
<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15660700.aspx>

<sup>17</sup> B.A. Vermaseren, *De Katholieke Nederlandse Geschiedschrijving* (Uitgeverij Gerben Dykstra - Leeuwarden 1981), 77.

<sup>18</sup> Geuzen: "Beggars"

<sup>19</sup> Femke Deen, *Publiek debat en propaganda in Amsterdam tijdens de Nederlandse Opstand: Amsterdam 'Moorddam' (1566-1578)* (Amsterdam University Press 2015), 124.

<sup>20</sup> *The Troubles at Den Briel, 1566-1567*, accessed 3/7/2023  
<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/1567brielle.aspx>



Alba's authority, banished 83 men from Den Briel—a city in southern Holland—along with their property's confiscation.<sup>21</sup>

The status of those banished from Den Briel was diverse. Willem van Treslong and Nicolaas van Sandijck, both noblemen, were accused of being *geuzen*. A commoner, Pieter Michielszoon, was reported to have defended iconoclasm by comparing the Catholic church to the Whore of Babylon. The chief of the city's ordinance, Eeuwout Corneliszoon, was caught wearing a *geuzen* badge. And Cornelis Heyndricxzoon was banished solely for allowing Calvinists to lodge at his estate.<sup>22</sup> It is probable that not every Catholic supported the Council of Troubles. One of the Council's greatest critics was the Catholic Egmond family, who once ruled the Duchy of Guelders. The Council was however still operated by Catholic authorities. As an institution for persecution, Calvinists certainly viewed the Council's operatives as tyrannical. It is of course unfair to blame property confiscation on all Catholics, but this act of aggression was unbeneficial for Catholic-Calvinist relations in Holland. As Calvinist intolerance toward Catholics grew in future years, the Council's legacy was not forgotten.

By 1572, most of the provinces were in open revolt against Spain. The northern provinces—which were bounded on the south by the Rhine—were united behind the Prince of Orange; Holland's urban areas were however still primarily Catholic. William of Orange invaded Holland in June of 1572 with an army of Calvinist *geuzen*. William was still 'Catholic in name only' and sought to bring the wealthy Hollander cities to his side. The Prince of Orange was personally a Lutheran, but was pretending to be Catholic and at the moment was leading an army

---

<sup>21</sup> *The Troubles at Den Briel, 1566-1567*, accessed 3/7/2023  
<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/1567brielle.aspx>

<sup>22</sup> *The Troubles at Den Briel, 1566-1567*, accessed 3/7/2023  
<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/1567brielle.aspx>

of Calvinists. With that in mind, he was forced to find a compromise between the Catholic cities and his Calvinist army.

His first negotiation was with Leiden, which agreed to open a Reformed church as long as William's mercenaries respected the city.<sup>23</sup> Delft agreed to the same terms. On 25 June the *geuzen* diplomat Barthold van Mentheda entered the wealthy port of Dordrecht. The city refused to publicly permit Calvinist worship and maintained their official loyalty to King Philip—although they agreed to join the fight against Alba.<sup>24</sup> Kampen and Schoonhoven, which joined William in August and October, respectively, also agreed to vague terms regarding religious tolerance—Schoonhoven promised to allow the creation of a 'geuzen' church.<sup>25</sup>

Holland was, once again, split over the question of religious tolerance. Most Hollanders however agreed that Alba's military presence was intolerable.<sup>26</sup> The first independent session of the States of Holland occurred on 19-20 July 1572. In accordance with the Prince of Orange and the overall diplomacy of the early revolt, the States maintained their loyalty to King Philip, yet decried the Duke of Alba's tyranny.<sup>27</sup> In a dramatic rebuke of Holland's previous intolerance towards Calvinism, the States openly called for the freedom to practice either religion:

Furthermore, the aforesaid representative has declared that it was His Highness' intention that there should be freedom of religion, for both the

---

<sup>23</sup> "Accords" negotiated between the Prince of Orange and the Magistrates of Leiden, Delft, Dordrecht, Kampen en Schoonhoven, June-October 1572, accessed 3/8/2023

<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15720710.aspx>

<sup>24</sup> "Accords" negotiated between the Prince of Orange and the Magistrates of Leiden, Delft, Dordrecht, Kampen en Schoonhoven, June-October 1572, accessed 3/8/2023

<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15720710.aspx>

<sup>25</sup> "Accords" negotiated between the Prince of Orange and the Magistrates of Leiden, Delft, Dordrecht, Kampen en Schoonhoven, June-October 1572, accessed 3/8/2023

<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15720710.aspx>

<sup>26</sup> Deen, *Publiek debat en propaganda in Amsterdam tijdens de Nederlandse Opstand*, 171.

<sup>27</sup> *First 'free' Assembly of States of Holland, 19-20 July 1572*, accessed 3/8/2023

<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15720819Dordt.aspx>

Reformed and the Roman religion and that every individual shall enjoy free exercise of the same in public and in a church or chapel.<sup>28</sup>

The States, although asserting that Philip was their King, later on authorized William of Orange to take command of the province's military:

Likewise, they have besides also decided that they shall concert and reach an agreement with the other lands and provinces, insofar as it concerns them, to recognize, consider and hold His Highness as a preeminent member of the States General of the *Nederlanden*<sup>29</sup> and therefore entitled to protect the same *Nederlanden* against all foreign invasions and oppression, as one bound by honor and oath to act as protector and head of the same provinces in the absence of His Royal Majesty.<sup>30</sup>

The 1572 States of Holland represent a significant compromise between Catholics and Calvinists. The decision does not provide us with personal opinions over tolerance, but implies that a significant number of Catholic authorities were willing to coexist with their Calvinist neighbors. They were at least willing to grant the Prince of Orange command of the country's defense.

From councilmen refusing the demands of schouten in Brabant and Catholic intolerance seeming to decline in Holland, by 1572 tolerance appeared to be winning. The Calvinists had campaigned for their right to worship freely, but had faced fierce opposition from some

---

<sup>28</sup> *First 'free' Assembly of States of Holland, 19-20 July 1572*, accessed 3/8/2023  
<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15720819Dordt.aspx>

<sup>29</sup> The *States of Holland* was not the same as the *States-General*. The *States-General* was a multinational legal body which primarily included countries within the Holy Roman Empire's Burgundian Circle. Whereas the *States of Holland* was the governing body of the County of Holland, said government sent delegates to the *States-General*. At the *States-General*, sovereign countries focused on alliances, diplomacy, etc. Regarding Holland's policymaking, the *States-General* was powerless compared to the *States of Holland*.

<sup>30</sup> *First 'free' Assembly of States of Holland, 19-20 July 1572*, accessed 3/8/2023  
<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15720819Dordt.aspx>

Catholics. This persecution was not easily forgettable, nor forgivable. Were examples of Catholic support for tolerance, however, also forgotten? Calvinist rebels were indeed fighting against a Catholic monarch, yet their definition of enemy—which will be further discussed—seems to have blurred the difference between the Catholic Philip and Catholics as a group.

### The Organization of Calvinist Churches and Power in Rebel Provinces

The Calvinist movement in the Seventeen Provinces was forced underground during times of Spanish military occupation. As the faith increased through the 1570s—along with a rebellion to support it—Calvinist theology was however further organized. In order to understand the religious aspects of the early revolt, we need to examine Calvinist theology's effects on society. We must primarily ask, how did the political transformation of the revolt—from a religious conflict to a war for separation—coincide with the development of Calvinist organization? Along with the movement's development, it is also necessary to uncover how Calvinist theology gained substantial power over rebel society.

Following the 1566 iconoclasm, the Duke of Alba quelled most civil unrest through Spanish military occupation of the Provinces. Calvinist theologians were forced to congregate outside of Spanish-controlled lands—at least for their own safety. As William of Orange's campaign recaptured much of the northern provinces, Calvinist theologians eventually returned and formed local synods. Many synods were reconvened after the provinces separated from Spain in 1581. In this section, we will explore Calvinist theological policy during the early revolt—both before and after provincial separation from Spain.

While Alba occupied most of the rebelling provinces, Calvinist theologians found refuge in the northwestern principalities of the Holy Roman Empire. Emden—ruled by the independent Count of East Frisia—was a hotbed of Calvinist policymaking. The 4 October 1571 Synod of Emden is often described as the first great meeting of exiled rebel Calvinists. A secret assembly however occurred in Wesel—ruled by the Duke of Cleves—exactly two months prior to the Synod of Emden. Relatively little information remains from the Wesel assembly, but remaining articles provide an example of Calvinist policy from the early 1570s. Regarding the selection of ministry candidates, the article reads:

A testimonial should be sought from the church, school or place where the candidate previously resided so that it may be quite clear whether he inclines to any heresy; whether he has busied himself to an unbecoming degree with singular and curious questions and vain speculations; whether he has read the books of heretics more diligently than is seemly and whether he has conversed much with fanatics and men given over to their own imaginings.<sup>31</sup>

Article VIII also reaffirmed Reformed churches' loyalty to the King of Spain. The article does not provide specific examples of heresy, but suggests that Calvinist theological authorities took preserving orthodoxy seriously. This was likely a necessary method to develop order within the underground church. The assembly was mainly concerned over the quality of Reformed ministers. It established specific guidelines for discipline<sup>32</sup> along with basic guidelines for receiving the Eucharist.<sup>33</sup> The remaining articles did not include infringements into everyday life,

---

<sup>31</sup> *Select Articles from the so-called Assembly at Wesel (1571), Article 8*, accessed 3/20/2023  
<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/1571Wesel.aspx>

<sup>32</sup> *Select Articles from the so-called Assembly at Wesel (1571), Chapter 8, Article 1*, accessed 3/20/2023  
<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/1571Wesel.aspx>

<sup>33</sup> *Select Articles from the so-called Assembly at Wesel (1571), Chapter 6, Article 7*, accessed 3/20/2023  
<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/1571Wesel.aspx>

such as punishment towards nonconformers. Compared to later Calvinist rhetoric, the Assembly at Wesel was straightforward and focused on church organization. There were strict guidelines for ministers, but congregations were given the autonomy to develop their own policy.

Importantly, the Assembly expressed the necessity for future updates:

If it should happen that Our Lord Jesus Christ hereafter bestow his grace more abundantly on the [provinces]<sup>34</sup>, there shall be room, both with regard to a pious reformation of the magistrate and the growth of the church, to develop these points more fully, as circumstances and times require, be it to augment, diminish or to revise these as necessary.<sup>35</sup>

What did it mean for God to ‘bestow his grace’ on the provinces? We can assume this referred to further rebel victories against Spanish occupation. Yet this quote raises the question as to whether or not the Wesel theologians were solely praying for the removal of Spanish forces. Since God has not yet bestowed his grace on the rebelling provinces, something was inherently wrong. Was this the existence of Catholicism? The theologians in Wesel had to wait several years before their movement gained political dominance in the rebel provinces. It is however important to remember this kind of thinking. The unreformed had not experienced God’s true grace, and the Calvinists wanted to change that.

The Synod of Emden, which began on 4 October 1571, was the primary religious constitution drafted by exiled Calvinists. William of Orange had requested that the exiled theologians form a single doctrine in order to unify the rebellion. The Synod drafted 53 articles which mainly adhered to Calvin’s original orthodoxy. The synod created outlines for individual

---

<sup>34</sup> The Assembly used the term *Nederlanden*, which probably referred to the rebelling provinces.

<sup>35</sup> *Select Articles from the so-called Assembly at Wesel (1571), Chapter 22*, accessed 3/20/2023 <https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/1571Wesel.aspx>

congregations, along with relatively uncontroversial rules for baptism, matrimony and communion. The synod argued for church equality; the first article states:

No church shall have dominion over another Church, no minister of the Word, or elder or deacon shall exercise dominion over another. Rather shall they be vigilant lest they should give cause to be suspected of desiring dominion.<sup>36</sup>

This rejected the Catholic system of hierarchy. The only instance in which the synod empowered Calvinists over other groups was with marriage. If unreformed parents rejected their children's marriage to a Calvinist, their opposition was overruled by the church.<sup>37</sup> Even as the Emden Synod abstained from discussing non-Calvinists, the theologians were quick to introduce Calvin's Genevan surveillance to the Provinces. Under the title of 'Ecclesiastical Discipline', the Synod encouraged members of local congregations to establish church oversight. Two of these articles read:

Hidden sins which might do grave damage to the commonwealth or the Churches, for example treachery or the seduction of souls, should be reported to the minister so that he may advise what should be done. If someone has sinned secretly but has not heeded the admonition of two or three persons, or has committed a public offense, he should be reported to the consistory.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> *Acts of the Synod of the Netherlands Churches both under the Cross and Scattered through Germany and East Friesland, held at Emden, 4 October 1571*, accessed 3/21/2023

<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15711004.aspx>

<sup>37</sup> *Acts of the Synod of the Netherlands Churches both under the Cross and Scattered through Germany and East Friesland, held at Emden, 4 October 1571, Article 22*, accessed 3/21/2023

<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15711004.aspx>

<sup>38</sup> *Acts of the Synod of the Netherlands Churches both under the Cross and Scattered through Germany and East Friesland, held at Emden, 4 October 1571, Articles 27-28*, accessed 3/21/2023

<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15711004.aspx>

The Synod of Emden may not have made extravagant demands of non-Calvinists, but its support of community surveillance paved the way for future conflict. Churches' ability to oversee their community's actions was not necessarily new. It was however an important step towards Calvinists' future hegemony in rebel provinces.

It does not take long to observe Calvinist growth in rebel governance. Only a few years after the Synod of Emden, Reformed churches were granted new authorities. This is especially evident in the 1574 Synod of Dordrecht, which sought to organize Calvinist churches in Holland. Regarding church organization, the Dordrecht synod referenced the articles written in Emden.<sup>39</sup> The theologians at Dordrecht, however, also published articles which expanded Calvinist authority outside of churches. Regarding education, the synod chose to control who could or could not instruct students:

The ministers shall see that the schoolmasters subscribe to the Confession of faith, submit to the discipline and also instruct the youth in the catechism<sup>40</sup> and other useful things. If there are any schoolmasters who refuse to comply, the minister shall ask their magistrates to exclude or to dismiss these.<sup>41</sup>

The Synod of Dordrecht also discussed the Anabaptist 'cancer' in the city. Calvinist ministers were ordered to publicly admonish those who refused to baptize their children. All Anabaptist congregations were required to be supervised by a Calvinist minister; that minister was encouraged to convert the 'infected'.<sup>42</sup> The Synod of Dordrecht did not go as far as to call

---

<sup>39</sup> *Select Acts from the Synod of Dordrecht, 15-28 June 1574, Article 1*, accessed 3/21/2023  
<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/157406dordt.aspx>

<sup>40</sup> At the Synod of Emden, Reformed ministers were to adhere to the Heidelberg Catechism

<sup>41</sup> *Select Acts from the Synod of Dordrecht, 15-28 June 1574, Article 22*, accessed 3/21/2023  
<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/157406dordt.aspx>

<sup>42</sup> *Select Acts from the Synod of Dordrecht, 15-28 June 1574*, accessed 3/21/2023  
<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/157406dordt.aspx>



for the extermination of Anabaptists, nor did it provide instructions with the city's Catholic population. The synod's intolerant rhetoric is important to highlight. Although it lacked anti-Catholic messaging, its harshness towards Anabaptists was a warning. Going back to the synod in Wesel, the Calvinists' quest to 'bestow God's grace' was seemingly in effect. Holland's Reformed theologians, in agreeing to include such intolerant rhetoric in their publication, had the ability to pave the way for further intolerance against other unreformed Christians. Ironically, the synod criticized Catholic policy over marital divorce, saying the decision should be left for civil authorities—theological advice was optional.<sup>43</sup>

On the eve of the United Provinces<sup>44</sup> declaring sovereign divorce from Spain, Zeelandic theologians met in Middelburg to form a new synod. Beginning in May of 1581, the synod's founders created a series of new rules for all Zeelandic residents. All Catholic festivals, other than Christmas and Ascension, were publicly banned.<sup>45</sup> As an even more radical decision, the synod ordered the dismantling of the separation of church and state:

Whereas the Christian discipline is spiritual and exempts no one from the civil courts and the punishment of the magistracy, so too is ecclesiastical discipline necessarily required in addition to civil punishment to reconcile the sinner with the Church and his neighbor and to remove the offense from the congregation of Christ.<sup>46</sup>

The Synod of Middelburg's decision to enforce Calvinist preferences on civil events represents a significant increase in Reformed power. To compare the two previously mentioned

---

<sup>43</sup> *Select Acts from the Synod of Dordrecht, 15-28 June 1574, Article 88*, accessed 3/21/2023

<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/157406dordt.aspx>

<sup>44</sup> After the rebel (northern) provinces separated from Spain in 1581, they were officially known as the *Republiek der Zeven Verenigde Nederlanden*, but were usually referred to as the United Provinces.

<sup>45</sup> *Select Acts from the Synod of Middelburg, 30 May-21 June 1581, Article 50*, accessed 3/21/2023

<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15810530Mi.aspx>

<sup>46</sup> *Select Acts from the Synod of Middelburg, 30 May-21 June 1581, Article 58*, accessed 3/21/2023

<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15810530Mi.aspx>

synods to that of Zeeland, greater Calvinist organization had indeed led to greater authority over civil governance. The Synod of Emden enforced strict discipline among Reformed churches—which were to spread all throughout the rebelling Provinces. In the case of Holland, intolerant rhetoric was normalized. Zeeland had finally taken the great leap of determining what was or was not permitted in civil affairs.

This change was indeed drastic. A mere two years after the synod meeting in Middelburg, the 1583 meeting of the States of Holland drafted a new series of ecclesiastical ordinances. The same institution which proclaimed Catholic and Calvinist freedom in 1572 chose to establish the Reformed faith as the province's official religion:

We hereby ordain and enact that throughout the lands and counties of Holland the following heads and articles concerning the ministry of God's Word and other ecclesiastical matters, or such as may appertain thereunto, shall be observed and followed.<sup>47</sup>

The following differ little from a synod constitution. As a civil authority, the States of Holland were granted the power to appoint and examine ministers' theology. In cities, burgomasters elected ministers, whereas schouts and magistrates decided in the countryside.<sup>48</sup> Local consistories included both theological authorities and local magistrates.<sup>49</sup> Local synods were also to be established; both theological and civil authorities were authorized to work together in order to “remove anything which shall be found a hindrance to the evangelical

---

<sup>47</sup> *Ecclesiastical Ordinances drafted by order of the States of Holland (1583), Preamble*, accessed 3/22/2023 <https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/1583StvH.aspx>

<sup>48</sup> *Ecclesiastical Ordinances drafted by order of the States of Holland (1583), Articles 1-2*, accessed 3/22/2023 <https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/1583StvH.aspx>

<sup>49</sup> *Ecclesiastical Ordinances drafted by order of the States of Holland (1583), Article 43*, accessed 3/22/2023 <https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/1583StvH.aspx>

doctrine”.<sup>50</sup> Similar to that in Zeeland, the States of Holland permitted the blending of theological and civil punishment for those excommunicated:

The consistory shall report the same to the civil authorities, i.e. the burgomasters and schepenen in the towns or the chief officer and local judges in the country districts... But if the magistrates shall object to the aforesaid public excommunication, and the members of the consistory still consider that the same should be followed for the sake of the church, the same shall be brought before the next provincial synod and there resolved and the sentence shall be pronounced by the synod, which shall be attended by as many deputies as the superior magistrate and the provincial states think appropriate for the matter in hand.<sup>51</sup>

The reason why the States of Holland’s 1583 Ecclesiastical Ordinances were so revolutionary has to do with the integration of theocratic and secular government. The policies made by the States have previously been reserved for synods. The government, becoming increasingly Calvinistic, deemed the formation of a state Reformed church acceptable. Calvinism had become Holland’s state church, instead of maintaining a coexistence with Catholicism. With state control in the hands of Calvinists, Holland’s Reformed authorities were posed to revoke the province’s tolerant laws.

This is evident through Calvinist rhetoric in the later 1580s. An example of Holland’s Calvinist intolerance includes the 1586 Synod of The Hague. Magistrates and consistories were

---

<sup>50</sup> *Ecclesiastical Ordinances drafted by order of the States of Holland (1583), Article 45*, accessed 3/22/2023 <https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/1583StvH.aspx>

<sup>51</sup> *Ecclesiastical Ordinances drafted by order of the States of Holland (1583), Article 48*, accessed 3/22/2023 <https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/1583StvH.aspx>

given the authority to expel any Catholic priest if they refused to preach the Heidelberg Catechism.<sup>52</sup> Strict adherence to Calvinist orthodoxy was also deemed necessary by the synod:

No one shall be admitted to the Lord's Table unless he conforms to the practice of the church he is joining and has made a profession of the Reformed religion as well as furnishing a testimony to his pious conversation. Without this those who also come from other churches shall not be admitted.<sup>53</sup>

The Synod of The Hague continued demanding more civil concessions. Public Catholic and Anabaptist places of 'blaspheming' worship were to be abolished.<sup>54</sup> Catholic monasteries and convents were to lose their pensions and be broken up in order to stop the spread of blasphemy.<sup>55</sup> All private businesses were to be closed on Sundays, or whenever worship was in session.<sup>56</sup> Arguably the most radical demand, all schouten and civil officials had to be certified by the church in order to "prevent the subjects from following all evil examples".<sup>57</sup>

Through the development of Calvinist synods during the first two decades of the revolt, we can see how its followers eventually dominated religious decision making. What began as a desire to form an organized church became something far more powerful and intolerant. As the United Provinces formally separated from Spain, the barrier between civil and theological authority was dismantled. Based on the synods and civil policy from Holland and Zeeland, the

---

<sup>52</sup> *Select Acts from the Synod of The Hague, 20 June - 1 August 1586, Article 47*, accessed 3/22/2023  
<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15860620.aspx>

<sup>53</sup> *Select Acts from the Synod of The Hague, 20 June - 1 August 1586, Article 54*, accessed 3/22/2023  
<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15860620.aspx>

<sup>54</sup> *Select Acts from the Synod of The Hague, 20 June - 1 August 1586, Article 6*, accessed 3/22/2023  
<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15860620.aspx>

<sup>55</sup> *Select Acts from the Synod of The Hague, 20 June - 1 August 1586, Articles 13-14*, accessed 3/22/2023  
<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15860620.aspx>

<sup>56</sup> *Select Acts from the Synod of The Hague, 20 June - 1 August 1586, Articles 27-H.7*, accessed 3/22/2023  
<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15860620.aspx>

<sup>57</sup> *Select Acts from the Synod of The Hague, 20 June - 1 August 1586, Article H.8*, accessed 3/22/2023  
<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15860620.aspx>

unreformed were viewed as a hindrance, or as undesirable. Holland's rhetoric, especially from the Synod of The Hague, practically mimicked what Calvinists so despised during the Council of Troubles. As a recently persecuted group, rebel Calvinists showed little interest in defending religious tolerance. With the expansion of Calvinist authority, how did life physically change for the rebelling provinces' unreformed population?

### Calvinist Growth and Impact on Rebel Society

As the rebellion progressed through the 1570s and 1580s, rebel-held territory experienced both geopolitical and demographic change. The rebels slowly lost control of Flanders, and Calvinism continued to surge north of the Rhine. As the rebellion headed towards a divorce from Spain, rebel Calvinists questioned the status of religious tolerance in the provinces. Compared to sentiments expressed in 1572, religious tolerance became less valued by rebel Calvinists as they grew to be a greater political force. We have already examined how Calvinist churches acquired theological authority throughout select rebel provinces. In this section, we will observe how Calvinists' relationship with rebel society developed through the 1570s and 1580s.

The first few years of the revolt were largely unorganized; the Duke of Alba was able to subdue most rebel provinces by 1570. His Council of Troubles, although primarily focused on combating Calvinism, had even earned ire from many provincial Catholics. The 1568 executions of the Counts of Egmont and Hoorn—both Catholics who protested intolerant policies—solidified Alba's unpopularity throughout the Provinces.<sup>58</sup> William of Orange's swift campaign of 1572 restored much of the northern provinces into rebel hands. This culminated in

---

<sup>58</sup> Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation*, 202.

the tolerant policies of the States of Holland, along with the legalization of both Catholic and Calvinist churches in most cities.<sup>59</sup>

The years between 1572 and 1576 arguably represent the pinnacle of religious cooperation between rebel Calvinists and Catholics, at least on a political scale. It is important to understand that the rebels were not fighting for sovereign separation until 1581. In fact, there are four important dates which visualize the development of provincial geopolitics:

- 8 November 1576: The Pacification of Ghent
  - All provinces—which were in a personal union with Spain—in the Seventeen Provinces, both Catholic and Calvinist, formed an alliance. The union did not promote separation from King Philip, but agreed to fight against his policies.
- 6 January 1579: The Union of Arras
  - Several French-speaking provinces in Flanders and Wallonia rejected the previous alliance. Based on dissatisfaction with radical Calvinism, these Catholic provinces soon made peace with Spain.
- 23 January 1579: The Union of Utrecht
  - All remaining rebel provinces agreed to continue fighting and uphold religious tolerance. Most of Flanders and Brabant were under Spanish military occupation at the time.
- 26 July 1581: The Act of Abjuration
  - Rebel provinces officially declared divorce from King Philip's sovereignty, thus forming the United Provinces. The act had little Catholic support and—although secular—contained Calvinist rhetoric.

King Philip recalled the Duke of Alba in 1573. During the end of Alba's rule, Calvinist congregations were being established all over the rebelling provinces. Although the creation of new churches suggests greater tolerance towards Calvinists—even if said tolerance was

---

<sup>59</sup> *First 'free' Assembly of States of Holland, 19-20 July 1572*, accessed 3/8/2023  
<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15720819Dordt.aspx>

minimal—these new congregations proved quite uncompromising. Catholic and Calvinist politicians may have been united behind the rebellion, however religious problems on the homefront were clearly materializing.

On 19 July 1572, Matthijs Jacobszoon and Peter Matthijs, two Calvinist carpenters who had been exiled to Emden, returned to the village of Naaldwijk in southern Holland. According to Willem van Hooff's personal *dagboek*, the Countess of Arenberg's steward, the village spent the next three years arguing with the Calvinists. Jacobszoon and Matthijs demanded that Naaldwijk's Catholic church be reformed, but the Countess refused. In early November the pair broke into the church and destroyed the Catholic images. Even after Van Hooff's protest, the two conducted Calvinist sermons within the ruined church.<sup>60</sup> Clearly, Jacobszoon and Matthijs did not adhere to a 'live and let live' ideology. The two *demande*d immediate religious conformity, instead of building their own church and persuading residents. Naaldwijk was probably not the only village to experience such an event. The village's church records illustrated greater societal trends through a microhistorical means of analysis.

The 1572 States of Holland guaranteed an element of religious freedom, thus allowing the coexistence of churches in Naaldwijk. The Countess or her steward, however, had to grant permission to individual ministers. Van Hooff fought with the pair for the remainder of 1572 over who should be Naaldwijk's Reformed minister. With backing from the theologian Pieter Dathenus and with the Prince of Orange's permission, Van Hooff was overruled.

In January of 1573, Van Hooff documented an unusual confrontation with Naaldwijk's Calvinist leadership. Jacobszoon, Matthijs and their chosen minister—who remained unnamed—arrived unannounced at Van Hooff's house. The three were upset with the Reformed

---

<sup>60</sup> *The Formation of a Reformed Congregation in a Village: Naaldwijk 1572-1575*, accessed 3/8/2023 <https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15721575Na.aspx>

church's low attendance, and sought the Catholic Van Hooff's help. They requested that the steward and his family attend a Calvinist service in order to boost attendance. If Van Hooff refused, they argued it placed the villagers' souls at risk. In response, Van Hooff asked, "...who had agreed and appointed [the minister] as a judge and overseer of my conscience?"<sup>61</sup> Van Hooff's question likely echoed the sentiments of other rebel Catholics. Was religious coexistence, which rebel Calvinists seemingly wanted, now intolerable?

According to the Reformed church's chronicle, Naaldwijk was temporarily abandoned in 1574 due to a Spanish offensive. When the congregation returned, they implemented stricter rules on ministers' theology. A report from 27 March 1575 reads:

A consistory was held and it was decided that the minister of the Word accompanied by an elder shall visit the houses of all the members on Wednesday next... that the examination of faith should take place in accordance with the ordinance of the synod, in the minister's house in the presence of one or two elders...<sup>62</sup>

Although Naaldwijk's story only tells us about a single village, it represents a general trend of the 1570s. Rebel policy, which a coalition of Catholics and Calvinists still authorized, embraced a seemingly utopian view of cooperation. Holland's toleration of Catholic and Calvinist worship, which had been drafted a short distance from Naaldwijk, is seemingly in conflict with the Reformed insistence on conformity. Naaldwijk still had a sizable Catholic population, along with Catholic leadership. What happened as the ratio between Catholics and

---

<sup>61</sup> *The Formation of a Reformed Congregation in a Village: Naaldwijk 1572-1575*, accessed 3/8/2023 <https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15721575Na.aspx>

<sup>62</sup> *The Formation of a Reformed Congregation in a Village: Naaldwijk 1572-1575*, accessed 3/8/2023 <https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15721575Na.aspx>



Calvinists became increasingly unbalanced? Van Hooff's story may not dive into Calvinist intolerance, yet gives us an idea of fanatic Calvinists' brazenness.

Further radicalization of local Calvinists is evident through the Reformed archive in the village of Ridderkerk. The church's chronicle begins in 1574, thus conveying Calvinist sentiments in the later 1570s. Located forty kilometers upriver from Naaldwijk, Ridderkerk's archive gives us a better understanding of how Calvinists' relationship with their communities developed in Holland. The village's first Calvinist minister, Caspar Anthueniszoon Gendt, occupied the village's Catholic church and destroyed its icons. Gendt, however, returned to Dordrecht in April of 1575 and was replaced with a moderate minister, Matthias Pieterszoon. He preached for four years, yet was apparently unpopular among the congregation. He was accused of living an 'unseemly life' and the locals campaigned for his removal.<sup>63</sup>

Pieterszoon was finally replaced in May of 1579 with a considerably more orthodox Calvinist, Johannes Rochus. Under Rochus's ministry, Ridderkerk's Reformed congregation was reorganized, and he sought to improve the village's overall welfare. Rochus blamed Matthias Pieterszoon and 'popery' for Ridderkerk's poor condition. He even appointed two well-known orthodox Calvinists, Cornelis Geertszoon and Maerten Pieterszoon, to catalog Ridderkerk's population and maintain 'good order'. Records show that a certain Cornelis Pieterszoon was denied the Eucharist due to unspecified reasons.<sup>64</sup> These decisions were similar to the sentiments expressed in later synods—such as those documented in Zeeland and Holland. Along with the previously observed increase in Calvinist authority over civil affairs, churches' role in everyday life was also impacted. Before the Reformation, the Church of course had a massive impact on

---

<sup>63</sup> *The Organisation of a Reformed Congregation in a village: Ridderkerk 1574-1584*, accessed 3/8/2023 <https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15741578Rid.aspx>

<sup>64</sup> *The Organisation of a Reformed Congregation in a village: Ridderkerk 1574-1584*, accessed 3/8/2023 <https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15741578Rid.aspx>

society, but not everyone in 1570s Holland believed in the same theology. With Ridderkerk's example, those who relied on civil protection against Calvinist extremism were slowly losing their legal armor.

The full extent of radical Calvinist power is illustrated through the church's record on 3 June 1584. The new minister, Johannes Bisschop, made two drastic declarations that day, the first regarding unreformed families:

Since some children had long remained unbaptised, it was decided that the minister should go with an elder to those who had withheld their children from baptism to admonish them to present their children for baptism so that such contempt of the sacrament might be removed.<sup>65</sup>

Ridderkerk's unreformed population is not specifically mentioned, but can be implied that most were either Anabaptists or Catholics. Based on families' refusal of infant baptism, Anabaptism is the most probable assumption. The fate of Cornelis Pieterszoon, who had been denied communion since 1579, mimics potential Calvinist persecution of Anabaptists:

They discussed the case of Cornelis Pieterszoon, who had been barred from the Lord's Supper when Johannes Rochus had been minister, and it was decided that they would earnestly admonish the same once more and follow Christ's commandment in Matthew 18:6.<sup>66</sup>

Matthew 18:6 reads:

---

<sup>65</sup> *The Organisation of a Reformed Congregation in a village: Ridderkerk 1574-1584*, accessed 3/8/2023 <https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15741578Rid.aspx>

<sup>66</sup> *The Organisation of a Reformed Congregation in a village: Ridderkerk 1574-1584*, accessed 3/8/2023 <https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15741578Rid.aspx>

But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.<sup>67</sup>

The archives at Ridderkerk's Reformed church tell a story which seems to reject the founding principles of Hollander tolerance. The call for religious tolerance which rang from The Hague in 1572 was questioned in Naaldwijk and muted in Ridderkerk. Hollander Calvinists such as Laurens Reael previously criticized Catholic intolerance towards Calvinists in the early decade. Yet the examples from these two villages present a similar situation with the sides reversed. As William of Orange and Philippe Duplessis-Mornay spoke of Catholic oppression and the victimization of provincial Calvinists, non-Calvinists north of the Rhine were probably questioning their safety. Duplessis-Mornay—a French Calvinist writing as a false Catholic—stated in his *Religionsvrede*:

As we cannot forbid these people to practice their religion without starting a war and cannot destroy them by that war without being destroyed ourselves, let us conclude that we must let them live in peace and grant them liberty...<sup>68</sup>

In April of 1581, following anti-Catholic riots in Guelders, Catholicism was officially banned in the province.<sup>69</sup> This event is often considered to be the catalyst for Catholic emigration from the United Provinces. One of William's powerful Catholic allies, Georges de Lalaing, Count of Rennenberg, abandoned the rebellion and confirmed his loyalty to King Philip. William, who had recently begun to embrace some aspects of Calvinism, reportedly responded to the Catholic exodus by stating, "[I] would never trust a Papist again, however loyal he seemed to

---

<sup>67</sup> Matthew 18:6, KJV

<sup>68</sup> Du Plessis Mornay, *Religionsvrede*, 164

<sup>69</sup> Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation*, 246

be”.<sup>70</sup> On 17 March 1580 William’s Calvinist advisor, Pierre Loyseleur de Villiers, went as far as to accuse all rebel Catholics—along with Lutherans—of treachery:

We see the Roman Catholics almost publicly wish for the King of Spain, those of the Augsburg Confession play with an idle hope of help from Germany, and all of them think of new ideas... If under the pretext of admitting a false religion the State runs into danger, it would not be clemency towards the enemies but cruelty towards one’s own people who through such cruel mercy would forfeit life, the State and religion.<sup>71</sup>

These observations therefore lead us to the question, were Calvinist rebels really concerned about tolerance? In 1581, the union was declared while Calvinist intolerance was on the rise. The tolerance which rebel Catholics—especially in Holland—exhibited upon Calvinists in the early 1570s was not repaid.

As Mornay’s *Religionsvrede* promoted tolerance, these selected stories suggest that the situation on the ground was quite different. Naaldwijk’s Calvinist leaders presented a lack of respect for Holland’s religious coexistence laws. They oversaw village affairs and bothered those who refused to adhere to the Reformed faith. The fanaticism recorded in Ridderkerk was a source of concern for unreformed Hollanders. If the Reformed church was willing to forcibly punish Anabaptists, what was at stake for Catholic villagers? Door-to-door admonition of the unreformed eerily mimics prior Catholic persecution of Calvinist Hollanders. Rael and Mornay’s writing for religious tolerance was seemingly futile, and their fellow Calvinists were to blame.

---

<sup>70</sup> Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation*, 247.

<sup>71</sup> Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation*, 247.

### The Fate of the Unreformed after Separation from Spain

So, having no hope of reconciliation, and finding no other remedy, we have, agreeable to the law of nature in our own defense, and for maintaining the rights, privileges, and liberties of our countrymen, wives, and children, and latest posterity from being enslaved by the Spaniards, been constrained to renounce allegiance to the King of Spain, and pursue such methods as appear to us most likely to secure our ancient liberties and privileges.

#### 1581 Act of Abjuration, Section IX

The first decade of the rebellion was arguably a war for religious freedom. This was at least the case for rebel Calvinists. Yet as Catholic authorities lost power in the northern provinces, their rights were soon stripped. The Calvinists, who began the revolt crying for religious liberty, thoroughly defied this philosophy through their persecution of the unreformed. Calvinist actions through the 1580s suggest that rebel authorities cared not for true religious tolerance, rather for the supremacy of the Reformed faith.

Intolerant policies established in the late 1570s previewed future difficulties for the rebelling provinces' Catholic subjects. The 1579 Union of Utrecht argued for general religious tolerance, which relayed themes from De Mornay's *Religionsvrede*.<sup>72</sup> The Union of Utrecht, however, had no actual power regarding individual provinces' religious laws. By 1580, public Catholic worship was banned in both the provinces of Utrecht and Friesland, and according to

---

<sup>72</sup> Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation*, 241

the *Archives ou correspondance inédite de la Maison d'Orange-Nassau*, Guelders's governor John of Nassau refused to prosecute anti-Catholic rioters.<sup>73</sup>

Before the 1581 Act of Abjuration, rebel Catholics were granted unkept promises of protection. The Union of Utrecht contained rhetoric supporting religious tolerance, even though the Union had no legal right to interfere in provincial decisions. For Catholics who supported the rebellion but detested separation, the idea of reconciliation with King Philip was a potential source of hope. Calvinist promises to maintain tolerant policy was questionable. For instance, in William of Orange's *Apologie*—ghost-written by the Calvinist Pierre Loyseleur—the Stadtholder contradicted his tolerant policies. After defending William's tolerance towards his 'Papist adversaries', Loyseleur wrote:

Some States thought it proper and useful for the sake of the country to maintain both religions. Since then we have learned through the insolence, intrigue and treachery of enemies in our midst that the State was in danger of inevitable destruction if we did not prevent the exercise of the Roman religion...<sup>74</sup>

This kind of rhetoric was surely confusing for rebel Catholics. The rebellion's leader, after being declared an outlaw by the King, had categorized his Catholic subjects as enemies via Loyseleur. Naturally, Catholic support for the rebellion deteriorated following the Act of Abjuration. Many provincial Catholics embraced *spaansgezindheid*<sup>75</sup>, which the historian Lodewijk Rogier defined in his *Geschiedenis van het katholicisme in Noord-Nederland* as “not any deep sympathy which made them [provincial Catholics] look towards Spain, but the mere

---

<sup>73</sup> Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation*, 241.

<sup>74</sup> Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation*, 248.

<sup>75</sup> *Spaansgezindheid*: Favorable feelings towards Spain.

desire to live in peace in the free practice of their religion”.<sup>76</sup> Beginning with the Union of Arras, some Catholic officials argued for an exodus from the rebel provinces. In 1580, a Flemish priest named Johannes Costerius published a popular pamphlet titled *Institutio Necessaria*. It was first printed in Douai, a Union of Arras-city where Costerius fled to. The pamphlet compared the Biblical exodus from Egypt and Babylon with the situation in the rebel provinces. He argued that Catholics should consider exile instead of facing discrimination within the Union of Utrecht.<sup>77</sup> Another exiled Catholic in Douai, Wouter Jacobszoon, categorized himself into a group called the ‘Good Catholics’. Based mainly out of Douai and Cologne, these ‘Good Catholics’ were loyal to the rebel cause but were treated as criminals in the rebel provinces.<sup>78</sup>

As the 1580s progressed, Calvinist domination over rebel society increased. William of Orange’s assassination in 1584 certainly fueled anti-Catholic sentiments among the rebellion. In places such as Holland, where Catholics still outnumbered Calvinists, the provincial government finally banned public Catholic worship. On 14 May 1587, a Catholic Hollander called Van der Mijle protested against such policy before the provincial court:

Instead of discouraging Protestantism<sup>79</sup>, the States have bestowed such advantages on it that it is the only one which can worship in public, although it is professed by hardly a tenth of the population. Its ministers should consider it a great mercy of God that they may preach the Word in public and practice their religion without any hindrance in a country where their followers are by far the minority, whilst the rest of the people are deprived of that same privilege.<sup>80</sup>

---

<sup>76</sup> Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation*, 248.

<sup>77</sup> Geert Janssen, *The Dutch Revolt and Catholic Exile in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge University Press 2014), 49.

<sup>78</sup> Janssen, *The Dutch Revolt and Catholic Exile in Reformation Europe*, 66.

<sup>79</sup> The term “Protestant” was used by Catholics to describe both Lutherans and Calvinists.

<sup>80</sup> Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation*, 249.

Even Thomas Sackville, Earl of Dorset, criticized such inequality in a 27 May 1587 letter to Queen Elizabeth [of England].<sup>81</sup> Van der Mijle's estimate was likely exaggerated, however a Calvinist minority had indeed acquired the majority of power in Holland.

The States General, the legislative body which governed all rebel provinces, thoroughly abandoned tolerance after William's murder. Rebel Calvinists, who protested against the Catholic placards of the 1560s, published their own at the States General on 21 November 1584. Anyone found guilty of organizing Catholic worship would be banished from the United Provinces.<sup>82</sup> Other placards were gradually introduced through the 1590s, including a ban on attending Catholic universities in Flanders, and a fine was introduced for secret marriages and baptisms.<sup>83</sup> These examples of anti-Catholic policy reinforce the claim that rebel Calvinists largely abandoned valuing religious tolerance.

On top of policy, individual Calvinist sentiments also reflected the rise in intolerance towards Catholics. A letter written by a Calvinist minister from Zoetermeer—in Holland—expressed his disdain for the unreformed. Written on 6 July 1586, Winandus Beeck Gerardi discussed his displeasure with Zoetermeer's Catholic residents to the fellow minister Arent Corneliszoon. Gerardi complained about Catholic burial practices—a public Catholic funeral was illegal in Holland<sup>84,85</sup>—and celebrated the persecution of pilgrims:

The papists on the barges which carry goods to the market have behaved very menacingly and insolently. They say that the ministers and others will assuredly pay because the pilgrims going to Wilsveen had been arrested.

---

<sup>81</sup> Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation*, 249.

<sup>82</sup> Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation*, 251.

<sup>83</sup> Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation*, 251.

<sup>84</sup> Judith Pollman, *Burying the dead; reliving the past: ritual, resentment and sacred space in the Dutch Republic* (Manchester University Press 2009), 84.

<sup>85</sup> Catholic mass and other rituals were legal but had to be conducted in secret. Persecution of Catholic funeral-practices lasted well into the 17th century in Holland.



They also spoke scornfully to the effect that the *procureur generaal* dare not release these now and that they had taken measures so that it would be some while before pilgrims were again arrested. In short, unless the papists are curbed, they will eventually do as they please, if nothing is done to improve matters.<sup>86</sup>

Even though this letter provides us with a single narrative, it represents the level of disdain and distrust within rebel society. Seemingly harmless rituals, such as burying the dead and performing pilgrimages, were punishable by civil authorities. Hollander Catholics were at the mercy of a government which no longer tolerated them. As intolerant Catholics despised Calvinists during the early revolt, Catholics now experienced such persecution twenty years later. The unreformed were unworthy of sympathy, suggested by Gerardi's letter. This was something which rebel Calvinists fought to gain under Catholic oppression.

Calvinist ministers were even encouraged to destroy Catholicism in Spanish-occupied Groningen. On 11 August 1586 Johannes Millius, writing in Appingedam, provided instructions for Calvinist activities in the occupied city. Regarding hostile Catholics, he wrote:

If there are any with some taste for God's Word and some spark of knowledge, be not slow to speak to them and spare no trouble in order to bring them to the flock. And if you are assailed by the enemies of the Gospel, bravely take up arms against them, and with sound doctrine and valiant spirit oppose their error and the Lord shall give the victory.<sup>87</sup>

---

<sup>86</sup> *The Unreformed State of the Countryside: the Experiences of a Calvinist Minister at Zoetermeer, 6 July 1586*, accessed 3/22/2023 <https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15860706.aspx>

<sup>87</sup> *The Plight of the 'Abandoned Christians' in the Ommeland of Groningen: a Minister Addresses his former Flock at Appingedam, August 1586*, accessed 3/23/2023 <https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/158608Ap.aspx>

Millius's designation of Catholics as 'the enemies of the Gospel' portrays the rebellion's transition from anti-Spanish to anti-Catholic. It can be reasoned that a true Christian should be a follower of the Gospel. If the unreformed are Christ's enemies, how should they be treated within rebel society? When Groningen eventually fell to rebel forces, the unreformed were faced with this question.

A church report from the summer of 1589 provides an example of punishment for the unreformed. In the southern Holland village of Oud-Beijerland, Calvinist theologians from Dordrecht discussed the fate of an unnamed man who refused to adhere to Reformed theology:

The brethren have also told of a man who has stayed away for a considerable time from the Lord's Supper and has adhered to several heresies and, despite being admonished, he does not repent, but goes so far that he will acknowledge no visible church; they desire advice as to how they should proceed in this matter, because the church ought to exercise her office in this. We have therefore recommended to them that the minister should visit him with an elder and admonish him once again and, if he gives no answer, that they shall deal with him in accordance with Christ's commandment.<sup>88</sup>

Christ's commandment was again recorded as Matthew 18:6.

According to the theologians' report, the unnamed man was not guilty of being a public nuisance. His crime was being unreformed. This example of Calvinist intolerance seems minimally different from the Catholic Council of Troubles which terrorized Holland's Reformed community twenty years prior. On top of Loyseleur's scapegoating of Catholics for the

---

<sup>88</sup> *A Visitation of the Reformed Churches in the Classis of Dordrecht, May - June 1589*, accessed 3/23/2023 <https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15890506.aspx>

rebellion's woes, the unreformed were viewed much more negatively after the provinces' separation from Spain. In Holland, public Catholic worship and rejection of Calvinism—based on the situation in Oud-Beijerland—were not tolerated, to the point of being declared illegal. Thus the status of Catholicism in rebel Holland had become what Calvinism once was. *De hypocrisie kan niet duidelijker zijn.*

### Conclusion

In modern remembrance of the Dutch Revolt, the rebellion's relationship with religious tolerance is paramount. From a Calvinist viewpoint, the revolt was caused by Catholic intolerance towards Reformed victims. If we focus on the organization of *geuzen*, the Council of Troubles and other stories of Catholic intolerance, this narrative is not false; Calvinists indeed faced persecution from Catholic authorities through the rebellion's earliest years. It is, however, not the full story. As we have seen in this analysis, the question of tolerance was indeed paramount, but in many cases intolerance prevailed.

We have seen how Catholic intolerance before and during the revolt's opening years provided Calvinists with reasons for prejudice. Catholic authorities had violently crushed other religious movements, and had suggested to do the same through placards. In Reael's journal entries, we have also seen how the early Calvinist movement in Holland faced fierce resistance from local Catholic leadership. This intolerance towards Calvinism left a legacy of distrust on the two religions' relationship. Yet we cannot forget the early examples of Catholic tolerance towards their Calvinist neighbors as well. From Brabantian officials refusing to persecute a Reformed minister, to the States of Holland's 1572 declaration of religious freedom, there were

clearly powerful Catholics who embraced at least legal tolerance. This was highlighted by the Union of Utrecht, in which a majority of rebel provinces guaranteed the freedom of the two faiths.

As civil decisions were made by a combination of Catholic and Calvinist policymakers, Reformed churches organized themselves through synods. Exiled synods, which were hosted outside of the Seventeen Provinces, developed a basic organization for provincial churches. As the synods' power expanded, such as in Zeeland and Holland, civil society became dominated by Reformed policies. The organization of Calvinist churches not only created a coherent theology, it also empowered the Calvinists to dominate rebel governance. The boundary between synod and government practically dissolved.

With this empowerment in mind, we were able to witness examples of how rebel Calvinists dominated civil society. In Holland, Calvinist demands on Catholic leadership intensified, along with Reformed churches' abilities to supervise communities. Eventually, a lack of adherence to Reformed theology was seen as a crime. This was what the Calvinists fought for against King Philip's Catholic regime.

Finally, we are presented with Calvinist intolerance towards Catholics in full-force after the 1581 Act of Abjuration. Calvinist rhetoric promoted their unreformed neighbors as enemies, and the religion's legality was continuously questioned. What Catholics offered in 1572—the freedom to worship—was rescinded in Holland by those who initially desired it. What is displayed is a clear case in which the persecuted became the persecutors.

Each of the stories presented in this analysis is at once isolated and unique, on the one hand, but they also serve as stepping stones for a chronological and geographical journey throughout the rebelling provinces, revealing a growing trend of Calvinist intolerance towards

Catholics. The question of tolerance is indeed paramount to understanding the United Provinces' rebellion. This question did not conclude in Mornay's utopian outcome. The Calvinists who so desired tolerance from Catholics failed to offer the same towards their neighbors. The United Provinces, facing another six decades of war against Spain, had abandoned the tolerant values which they originally fought for.

### Bibliography

#### Primary Sources

The Hedge-Predching in Holland, July 1566

<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15660700.aspx>

The Image-breaking in Antwerp, Flanders, Tournai, Holland, Utrecht and Friesland (1566)

<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15660701.aspx>

Contemporary Account of Image-breaking in 's-Hertogenbosch, Friday 23 August 1566

<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15660823.aspx>

A Calvinist from Utrecht denies having any part in the Image-Breaking in that Town, 25-27 August 1566 <https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15660825.aspx>

The Troubles at Den Briel, 1566-1567

<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/1567brielle.aspx>

Instruction issued on behalf of my Lord, the Prince of Orange, Count of Nassau which N.N. shall be obliged to follow if God gives them the Grace to take the Town of N., 24 November 1570

<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15701124.aspx>

Select Articles from the so-called Assembly at Wesel (1571)

<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/1571Wesel.aspx>

Acts of the Synod of the Netherlands Churches both under the Cross and Scattered through Germany and East Friesland, held at Emden, 4 October 1571

<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15711004.aspx>

"Accords" negotiated between the Prince of Orange and the Magistrates of Leiden, Delft, Dordrecht, Kampen en Schoonhoven, June-October 1572

<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15720710.aspx>

First 'free' Assembly of States of Holland, 19-20 July 1572

<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15720819Dordt.aspx>

Ordinance for the Use of the Churches by both 'Religions' in The Hague, 27 August 1572

<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15720827.aspx>

The Planting of Reformed Churches in and around Dordrecht: Letters of 29 August and 5 December 1572

<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15721200.aspx>

The Formation of a Reformed Congregation in a Village: Naaldwijk 1572-1575

<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15721575Na.aspx>

The Organisation of a Reformed Congregation in a village: Ridderkerk 1574-1584

<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15741578Rid.aspx>

Select Acts from the Synod of Dordrecht, 15-28 June 1574

<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/157406dordt.aspx>

Select Acts from the Synod of Middelburg, 30 May-21 June 1581

<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15810530Mi.aspx>

State of the Reformed Churches in the Countryside around Dordrecht, 24 April 1582

<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15820424.aspx>

Ecclesiastical Ordinances drafted by order of the States of Holland (1583)

<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/1583StvH.aspx>

Attestation for a Calvinist Family Departing from Antwerp on the Eve of the Surrender to Farnese, 13 August 1585

<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15850813.aspx>

Select Acts from the Synod of The Hague, 20 June - 1 August 1586

<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15860620.aspx>

The Unreformed State of the Countryside: the Experiences of a Calvinist Minister at Zoetermeer, 6 July 1586 <https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15860706.aspx>

The Plight of the 'Abandoned Christians' in the Ommeland of Groningen: a Minister Addresses his former Flock at Appingedam, August 1586  
<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/158608Ap.aspx>

A Visitation of the Reformed Churches in the Classis of Dordrecht, May - June 1589  
<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/15890506.aspx>

The Dilemma of a Calvinist Minister with a Rural Charge, 3 May 1602  
<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/16020503.aspx>

Religious Conditions in the Province of Utrecht, July 1606  
<https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/english/sources/Pages/160607Utr.aspx>

#### Secondary Literature

De Mooi, Charles. *Second-class yet self-confident: Catholics in the Dutch Generality Lands. Catholic Communities in Protestant States*. Manchester University Press 2009. 156-167

Deen, Femke. *Publiek debat en propaganda in Amsterdam tijdens de Nederlandse Opstand: Amsterdam 'Moorddam' (1566-1578)*. Amsterdam University Press 2015.

François, Wim. *Mattheus Jacobszoon's New Testament and the Addition of Registers and the Epistle to the Laodiceans to Dutch Mennonite Bibles. Religious Minorities and Cultural Diversity in the Dutch Republic*. Brill, Leiden, South Holland 2014. 73-88

Frijhoff, Willem. *Shifting identities in hostile settings: towards a comparison of the Catholic communities in early modern Britain and the Northern Netherlands. Catholic Communities in Protestant States*. Manchester University Press 2009. 1-17

Geurts, P.A.M. *De Nederlandse Opstand in de Pamfletten 1566-1584*. Dekker & Van de Vegt N.V., Nijmegen-Utrecht 1956.

Gregory, Brad. *Witnesses for the Gospel: Protestants and Martyrdom. Salvation at Stake*. Harvard University Press 1999. 139-196

- Gregory, Brad. *Nachfolge Christi: Anabaptists and Martyrdom. Salvation at Stake*. Harvard University Press 1999. 197-249
- Israel, Jonathan. *The Revolt and the Emergence of a New State. The Dutch Republic*. Oxford University Press 1995. 179-232
- Israel, Jonathan. *Protestantization, Catholicization, Confessionalization. The Dutch Republic*. Oxford University Press 1995. 361-398
- Janssen, Geert. *The Dutch Revolt and Catholic Exile in Reformation Europe*. Cambridge University Press 2014.
- Kaplan, Benjamin. *Integration vs segregation: religiously mixed marriage and the 'verzuiling' model of Dutch Society. Catholic Communities in Protestant States*. Manchester University Press 2009. 48-66
- Kaplan, Benjamin. *Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe*. Harvard University Press 2007.
- Kaplan, Benjamin, et al. *Boundaries and Their Meanings in the History of the Netherlands*. Brill, Leiden, South Holland 2009.
- Kaplan, Benjamin. Pollman, Judith. *Conclusion: Catholic communities in Protestant states, Britain and the Netherlands c.1580-1720. Catholic Communities in Protestant States*. Manchester University Press 2009. 249-264
- Kooi, Christine. *Calvinists and Catholics during Holland's Golden Age: Heretics and Idolaters*. Cambridge University Press 2012.
- Kooi, Christine. *Liberty and Religion: Church and State in Leiden's Reformation 1572-1620*. Brill, Leiden, South Holland 2000.
- Kooi, Christine. *Reformation in the Low Countries, 1500-1620*. Cambridge University Press 2022.
- Lecler, Joseph. *The Question of Tolerance up to the Division of the Low Countries (1566-1579). Toleration and the Reformation, Volume 2*. Associated Press of New York 1960. 195-225



- Lecler, Joseph. *The Condition of Catholics in the United Provinces. Toleration and the Reformation, Volume 2*. Associated Press of New York 1960. 241-255
- Lecler, Joseph. *The Controversies about Tolerance in the United Provinces at the end of the Sixteenth Century (1580-1600). Toleration and the Reformation, Volume 2*. Associated Press of New York 1960. 256-297
- Pettegree, Andrew. *Emden and the Dutch Revolt*. Oxford University Press 1992.
- Pollman, Judith. *Burying the dead; reliving the past: ritual, resentment and sacred space in the Dutch Republic. Catholic Communities in Protestant States*. Manchester University Press 2009. 84-102
- Van Veen, Mirjam. ‘. . . Your Praiseworthy Town Deventer . . .’ *Caspar Coolhaes on Unity and Religious Tolerance. Religious Minorities and Cultural Diversity in the Dutch Republic*. Brill, Leiden, South Holland 2014. 111-123
- Vermaseren, B.A. *De Katholieke Nederlandse Geschiedschrijving*. Uitgeverij Gerben Dykstra - Leeuwarden 1981.
- Voogt, Gerrit. *Constraint on Trial: Dirck Volckertsz Coornhert and Religious Freedom*. Truman State University Press 2000.
- Waite, Gary. *A Reappraisal of the Contribution of Anabaptists to the Religious Culture and Intellectual Climate of the Dutch Republic. Religious Minorities and Cultural Diversity in the Dutch Republic*. Brill, Leiden, South Holland 2014. 6-28
- Wilson, Charles. *The Dutch Republic*. World University Library 1968.